



Safety Alert - Weil's Disease

Weil's Disease, also known as Leptospirosis, is a rare disease in the UK. There are 40-50 cases reported per year of which 1 or 2 people die. It is carried by water organisms, so rowers can be at risk. A canoeist was recently diagnosed with the disease.

It is likely to be found in stagnant water, water that is adjacent to farm land and any water where rodents are common. In the early stages Weil's Disease can be mistaken for flu but can develop into jaundice, kidney and liver failure.

What are the symptoms?

Typically, symptoms develop between 7 – 14 days after infection, although it can be as short as 2 – 3 days or as long as 30 days. Symptoms can be like those of a flu-like illness with severe headache, chills, muscle aches and vomiting. Some people may not have symptoms.

Ways to avoid contracting Weil's Disease

The disease can be prevented by taking adequate precautions

- Wash or shower after rowing
- Cover minor cuts and scratches with waterproof plasters before getting in your boat
- Clean open wounds, such as blisters or calf abrasions with an anti-bacterial substance
- Wear trainers or boots to avoid cutting your feet before getting in your boat

This will also protect you against the risk of contracting other waterborne infections.

What to do if you think you have symptoms?

Many of the symptoms of Leptospirosis are the same as for other diseases and diagnosis is based on clinical suspicion followed by a blood test. There is a specialist reference laboratory for the disease that doctors can consult.

- Early diagnosis and treatment is important
- If you develop flu-like symptoms after rowing go to your GP and say that you are a rower
- Weil's Disease is treated with antibiotics which should be administered early in the course of the disease

How it is spread

Weil's Disease is a zoonotic condition, which means it is spread to humans by animals. You can become infected by drinking contaminated water, or if contaminated water or soil comes into contact with your eyes, mouth, nose or any unhealed cuts in the skin.

There is guidance on waterborne infections and diseases in section 8.4 of [RowSafe](#), and there is information on Weil's disease from the [British Rowing Medical Panel](#) and [NHS Direct](#).

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